



continuous conversion

Volume 4, Number 8
August & September 2009

even more little gods

by Sara Tusek

I am your God

Exodus 20:1 says this:

"God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the LORD your God... 'You shall have no other gods before Me.'

In the April 2009 issue of *continuous conversion* I wrote about the little gods people often revere. Those little gods were family; pastors, ministers and teachers; and the concept of our own personal calling by God. And in May 2009 I wrote about more little gods: the Bible, Icons and Images, and the Prosperity Gospel.

In the first of the Ten Commandments, God makes it very clear that He (and He alone) must be the object of our worship. But living with God as our one and only God is not as easy as it might appear. Too often, we make little gods of various parts and elements of the Christian life, fastening on them as if they could save us from our sinful selves, or as if they were worthy of our primary devotion.

Here, then, are even more little gods; worthy and respectable obsessions that may, if we are not careful, take the place of the true living God in our lives.



THEOLOGY

Definition of theology

theos, "God"

logos, "word, study, science"

thus, "the science or study of God"

St. Augustine: *theology is "rational discussion respecting the deity"*

Charles Hodge: *"science of the facts of divine revelation"*

Louis Berkhof: *the "systematized knowledge of God in his various relations to the universe. . . . Theology is the effect which the divine revelation, embodied in Scripture, produces in the sphere of systematic thought. Theology is the fruit of the reflection of the church on the truth revealed in the Word of God."*

From Theology 1: Revelation and Theological Method

Western Reformed Seminary (www.wrs.edu)

John A. Battle, Th.D.

Theology is a very logical little god. It seems only right to think systematically about God as He is revealed in the world, in the Bible and in the lives of those who follow Him. And to organize these thoughts into categories, to mull over the meaning and effects of these thoughts, then to write them down and publish them, is surely a good course of action.

Studying God's character is encouraged in such verses as this one, Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

So theology seems completely blameless and praiseworthy, until you look more closely at what theology has produced:

1. *Sectarian divisions and hostility*
2. *Excommunication and shunning*
3. *Radical separation of the parts of the body of Christ*

The Protestant Reformation, with its resulting wars and genocides, is an example of the harmful effects of theology. Man's reason, when worshipped as a little god, will only produce division and hatred, never unity and love.

To p. 2

OUR DELUSION OF IMMORTALITY

Literature is full of stories of man who never die. Most of these stories acknowledge the “dark side” of immortality: Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, for example, shows the desperation and misery that awaits those who worship their own earthly life.

Christianity offers a way to overcome eternal death, but not earthly death. Our mortal bodies must and shall die—the Bible makes this very clear.

But the desire to live forever, in the state that we know as living (that is, in a mortal body) can be so overpowering that we pour energy and resources into maintaining mortal life, forgetting the words of Peter 1:24:

For all flesh [is] as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

We are not immortal, though we have been given a new life, in a new body, through our identification with Jesus Christ. Christians will die, as all people do, but will be resurrected in Christ.

OUR HEALING FROM DISEASE

This little god generates a tremendous controversy in Christian circles everywhere. The Bible gives examples of God’s healing powers, as in Exodus 15:26.

If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee."

God can and does heal people, yet He obviously does not answer every prayer as we pray it for healing, as people die or suffer from disease in spite of much prayer. As St. Paul says of himself,

2 Corinthians 12:7-9: "...there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me". (ASV)

Paul suffered from a "thorn in the flesh" that he asked God to heal. His requests were rejected. Paul was neither able to cure himself or persuade God to cure him.

Yet some well-meaning Christians insist that God will answer every prayer for healing as we ask for it, citing Bible verses about prayer to support their view. They make God the “cosmic butler,” as my friend Jim said, believing that they can dictate to God how and when to use His healing powers. These people are not acknowledging God’s sovereignty.

OUR SUCCESS

American Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the 17th century held the doctrine of predestination, which implies that our salvation is predetermined before our birth. Some are chosen, some are not—end of story. This belief led to the idea that a person’s “success in life” (that is, health, wealth in land and family—the Hebrew triumvirate of success) could be interpreted by his fellow men as an indication of salvation or lack thereof.

Often Christians fall into a trap of backward logic: if we succeed in a task, then God must have willed us to do it. If we fail, it wasn’t God’s will. Backward logic also leads people to believe that when they carry their umbrella, it doesn't rain; cause and effect are linked in a human, not godly, way.

THE ONLY GOD

All these pathetic little gods are simply human attempts to deprive the true living God of His omnipotence and glory. Don’t fall into a trap of man’s devising; make God your only God. He deserves it!

